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AN APPEAL
FOR THE
PUBLIC
LIBRARY.



New Westminster, B. C.

COLUMBIAN PRINT.

When, in 1859, the Royal Engineers, in command of Colonel Moody, came to British Columbia, they brought with them a collection of books, partly donated, partly subscribed for by the officers and men, valued at £500. The selection was made by Bulwer Lytton, the novelist, at that time Colonial Secretary, and in the list of persons who gave volumes were the Queen, whose gift included a handsome copy of the Prince Consort's speeches, bound in vellum and bearing Her Majesty's autograph. (This book was fortunately saved.) Lady Franklin, widow of the intrepid Sir John, and the Duke of Westminster, were also donors.

The corps formed "The Camp" at what is now Sapperton (still affectionately known to old residents of New Westminster by its first designation), and, before very long, the Royal Engineers' Club was built by the men, who fitted up with proper pride a room for the library. During the winter months, theatrical performances were given, a stage being one of the attractions of the Club House. The scenery was the work of Corporal White.

On the disbandment of the corps, in 1863, the men handed their library over to the City of Westminster, on the one condition that, for all time the men of the corps should have access to the books free of all charge. The volumes were removed to the frame building in which for a brief time the only coins minted in British Columbia had been struck. Fortunate was it that the removal was made; for, in the year following (1864), the Royal Engineers' Club was destroyed by fire.

The Public Library, for many years, appears to have been kept alive by public spirited persons who were willing to manage matters and see that the place was properly looked after. Of these, the late Rev. Mr. Jamieson, Messrs. Clute, J. C. Brown, Keary, Major, and Captain Peele were the leading spirits. From time to time, Indian curios, and specimens of minerals brought to the city by ad-

venturous hunters and prospectors, were left with the management, who had them placed in glass cases ranged round the room. A charge of fifty cents a month was made to those who used the library, and this paid or helped to pay the janitor of the building.

In the early eighties, when Mr. Morley Roberts was living in the city, the books still formed a good collection. Neglect had not yet spoiled the pioneer library, as this extract from "The Western Avernus" shows: "Then I went through the bookshelves, with the librarian showing me a light, and I saw enough to make me promise to be a subscriber, at the moderate terms of 50 cents or 2s. 1d. a month. I brought up the money next evening, and took home Buckle's History of Civilization, a book I had never read through before. There were 2,000 volumes in the library, and, during the time I stayed in New Westminster, I devoured most of those that were worth reading, for there was a vast amount of engineering and military matter."

The picture drawn in this chapter comes back vividly to those who spent their leisure around the big box stove, in the days when Henry Hughes had charge, or, later, when Colonel McGregor, with much effort, delivered himself of short paragraphs telling of social and other equally thrilling events which formed the staple news of the days before British Columbia's awakening.

In 1886, the Federal Government gave the city 56 feet frontage on Columbia street, for the purpose of a free library "for ever." An extra ten feet was added to this, the year following. In 1890, began the building of the three storey brick and stone Public Library, which, with its contents, was burned on September 10th last. This structure was on the site of the old frame building, and the contents had to be removed, of course, prior to the clearing of the site and subsequent erection of the new library. When completed, in 1891, a fine appearance was made. The ground floor was

rented out in stores. The entrance to the library was of stone, with a pavement in mosaic, leading, by a broad stairway, to large reading and book rooms on the second floor, and an auditorium at the top. The windows on the landings were in colored glass and shed a softened light.

The first Board of Commissioners was placed in charge of the institution, about July, 1890, and, upon a very memorable afternoon (the rain was pouring in torrents) proceeded to take stock of the belongings which had been in the old mint building, and which they were informed were stored in the old postoffice (a rickety shed up a steep ascent of stairs, which long lingered at the side of the newer building in which the Dominion Government officials transacted their business. Things were found in complete chaos. The place was one mass of papers, books, and rubbish, shot in heaps on the floor. The glass cases in which had been stored specimens, were broken in by the weight of books carelessly pitched on their tops. The door was off its hinges, the rain was beating in, and the whole was filthy dirty. The 5500 worth of books had fallen on evil days, indeed, and, when things had been straightened out, not 200 of the 2,000 books of which Morley Roberts wrote were found serviceable enough to loan to the public.

The reading room was at once fitted up with papers and magazines, and a supply of new books procured. From year to year, these were added to by donations, which were generous from the first, but which, in 1894-5-6, amounted in value to at least three dollars for every one expended by the corporation. Gifts of portraits of well known persons were secured, and hung around the reading room. A leading feature in the reference library was the unique collection of reports of fisheries issued by the principal Governments of Europe and the United States.

In the autumn of 1895, the management reorganized the Museum, obtaining funds

for the purpose of fitting up the auditorium with glass cases, by means of a series of high class lectures on literary subjects. The museum, from its beginning, was successful beyond expectations. Each report of the Library Commissioners, from 1895, was a chronicle of continued prosperity. In the year named, the Library was estimated to contain about 1,500 books, about 1,000 persons were entered as borrowers, and the average daily attendance in the reading room was 130 persons. At the time of the fire, more than 2,000 volumes were on the shelves, and the attendance in the reading room had risen to about 150 a day. There were in the museum, on the night of the fire, six large cases of stuffed birds and mammals unopened, the gift of the Provincial Government. These, together with a variety of exhibits (many of which can never be replaced) were completely destroyed by fire.

The City Council have appointed us a Board of Library Commissioners for the purpose of opening up a reading room and reorganizing the Public Library. The reading room is now open to the public, and is situated on McKenzie st. To replace the library will be a work of difficulty and time, but can be done. The institution which we lost in the fire was largely — pre-eminently — the result of voluntary contribution. The Commissioners have in their possession about 180 volumes which, at the time of the disaster, were in the hands of the public, and they ask the public, who, in the past, found the library so great a benefit to them to assist in speedily re-opening the institution by gifts. The Commissioners will thankfully acknowledge any volumes handed to them for this object, whether bound in paper or cloth.

R. E. WALKER, M.D. (Chairman),
JAMES JOHNSON (Secretary),
AULAY MORRISON, M. P.,
FRED. HOWAY,
ARTHUR SHEPHERD,
Board of Commissioners.

1899

For the Museum.

Two more donations have been received by the Public Library Commissioners for the museum.

One of these is a splendid specimen of the noduled crab, which was captured near Plumper's Pass. It fills a box eight inches square, and was presented by the Provincial Museum, and conveyed hither by Dr. Walker.

The other contribution consists of a number of old letters and other documents relating to the establishment in this city of a mint. One of these papers is, apparently, the original bill of lading for the assay and mint plant. It was shipped to San Francisco on the British ship "Eliza," from London, and there transferred to the ship "Gold Hunter," consigned to "Capt. Gossett, R. E., Victoria. Other papers, dated Royal Mint, 17th Oct., 1858, convey the information that Francis George Olandet had been appointed assayer; Frederick Henry Bonsfield, assistant assayer; and William Hitchcock, assistant and operating melter.

These interesting relics were presented by Mr. Justinian Pelly, formerly of this city, but now of Chilliwack.

Mrs. S. James, Seaforth, suffered for years with what is called old people's rash. She was treated by many physicians, without any result. Mr. Fear-

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